

Mission Printing Office (Mission Group)  
King & Kawaiahao Streets  
Honolulu  
Honolulu County  
Hawaii

HABS No. HI-20

HABS  
HI,  
2-HONLU,  
20-

PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20240

HABS  
HI,  
2-HONOLU,  
20-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MISSION PRINTING OFFICE (MISSION GROUP)

HABS No. HI-20

ADDRESS: King and Kawaiahao Streets, Honolulu, Honolulu County, Hawaii

OWNER: Hawaiian Mission Children's Society

OCCUPANT: None

USE: Museum

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Between the two mission houses on land given by King Kamehameha II to the first mission company as a homesite, stands the old Mission Printing House, constructed in 1823.

The pioneer Mission company to the Hawaiian Islands brought their Ramapo printing press around the Horn in 1820 and when it was unpacked in Honolulu in August of that year, it was found to be undamaged. Temporarily the press was housed in a thatched house belonging to the Mission family. However, when wind blew the roof of the hut off, the press was taken into the home of the Loomis family where it was again set up. There on January 7, 1822, the first public printing was done on the press with Governor Keeaumoku taking off the first sheet. Printing was continued for several days in February 1822, but operations were then suspended until a permanent home for the press could be provided.<sup>1</sup>

By the end of December 1822 construction of a printing house was underway. The work was done by members of the Mission company stationed in Honolulu with, no doubt, some native assistance. Some sources credit Daniel Chamberlain as chief builder of the printing house as he had begun the construction. However, Chamberlain left Hawaii in March 1823 and other men, particularly

Elisha Loomis, who was in charge of the press, and Levi Chamberlain, who arrived in April 1823, seem to have taken charge of the work. As there was a distinct "want of beams, plank, boards, and shingles," it was decided to use coral stone for the building material. The coral was easily obtained in abundance near the vicinity of the mission houses at a depth of a few feet from the surface of the ground. The coral was "laid in mortar of the common soil." Fortunately, the mission was able to purchase the hull, bowsprit and two masts of the wrecked whaling ship Ruby to use in building the printing house, a dwelling house, and for fuel. By August 1823, the Mission could report that they had "Completed the walls of the printing house which when covered will be ready for use. The building has cost 250 dols, and will probably require 50 more to complete it ... the dimensions are 28 feet by 17 which will afford room for two presses with their variety of apparatus."<sup>2</sup>

It had originally been proposed to make the building fireproof by covering it with tile ordered from Canton. However, the decision hinged on two considerations - if the tiles could be procured at a reasonable cost and if a person could be found who understood fitting them on. By the end of August 1823 the decision had been made and tiles from Canton had been ordered to cover the roof. There is, however, no record that such tiles were actually received or used. At the same time glazed windows for the printing house were requested from the Mission Board in Boston.<sup>3</sup>

By November the building was nearly complete and shingling of the roof was begun on November 5. The mission report noted that "we are obliged to make our shingles in part of bits of thin boards rived and hewed with a hatchet by the natives of the Northwest coast." Elisha Loomis, however, records that the mission had to saw their own boards and split the shingles.

The roof was finished in about three weeks, by November 22. The inside walls were quickly covered with tapa pasted on with poi. Perhaps this did not prove very satisfactory, for less than a year later, Mr. Loomis was investigating the possibility of laying over the inside of the printing house with plaster made of "lime and a peculiar kind of clay called pohu found near the Pearl River."<sup>4</sup>

By December 2, 1823 the printing house was complete and Mr. Loomis moved in and set up the press. A few days later he began printing an edition of Hawaiian hymns.<sup>5</sup>

It would appear that even this printing house did not prove satisfactory for long. Two years later on December 26, 1825, Mr. Loomis wrote to the Mission Board that "our present printing office being much too small, we have commenced building an addition to it of some 30 x 19 feet and two stories high." The building referred to by Loomis may, however, have been built across the street, rather than as an addition to the original printing house as there is no other confirmation of such an addition being constructed.<sup>6</sup>

After 1825 there is an almost total lack of records concerning the mission printing house, and any repairs or alterations made to it. It appears that it was used for twelve years by the Mission printers and was then associated with the frame house standing just adjacent on the Waikiki (left) side of the building. In a letter of November 14, 1844 from Levi Chamberlain to the Mission Board, he speaks of the building as serving both as a storehouse and a dwelling, being united to the frame house by low buildings. According to the remembrance of a member of the Hall family in 1897, her parents, the Halls, lived in this building and she was born there in 1842. In 1851 the printing house together with the frame house came

into the possession of the Cooke family. It is not known what use they made of the building, but as they kept several boarders in their home, it is possible they may have used it for their accommodation. According to a friend of the Cooke family, Mrs. A.S. Cooke continued to live in the buildings until 1880 and for perhaps eight years after this it was occupied by other family members and friends. It then stood unoccupied for several years.<sup>7</sup>

Interest in preserving the frame house as a relic of the early mission days in Hawaii led to the acquisition of this building together with the printing House in 1907 by the Cousins Society, officially known today as the Hawaiian Mission Children's Society. Mr. Charles M. Cooke had offered to lease the buildings to the Cousins for a dollar a year with the idea that if they were interested enough to keep them in good condition, they might ultimately be ceded to them as, in fact, they were in 1925.

The H.M.C.S. committee appointed to investigate the condition of the mission buildings found the printing house to need few alterations. "Your committee believes that this building with comparatively little expenditure can be made almost fireproof by the building of a new roof of slate instead of shingles and with all the supporting timbers covered with tin. [Later on in the rear of this building, a fireproof vault can be built.]<sup>7</sup> The total cost of this work will be in the neighborhood of \$2750." This cost estimate seems to include \$1500 needed for the frame house.<sup>8</sup> There are no records to indicate that the alterations recommended by the committee were completely carried out.

After its renovation the printing house became the office of the H.M.C.S. in 1908 and served in this capacity until 1950. Apparently before the Society moved in, a cement floor was laid and shelves were built to hold the reports

and papers of the group. The walls were also freshly cemented and plastered and the building was considered to be insect-proof.<sup>9</sup>

The only records concerning repairs and alterations to the printing house in the ensuing years are for minor work such as painting, replastering and repairs for insect damage. The printing house today is used as a museum; a replica of the first printing press and its print work are displayed in the building along with other mementos from the early mission family.

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Footnotes: (Manuscripts; Letters; Journals are in the HCS Library, Hon., Hawaii)

<sup>1</sup>Mrs. R.W. Andrews, The Story of Three Old Buildings in Honolulu, (Honolulu, 1926), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Missionary Letters, I, 24, December 28, 1822.

Missionary Letters, I, 31, March 20, 1823.

Manuscript Letter, L. Chamberlain to H. Hill, August 7, 1823.

Journal of the Sandwich Islands Mission, August 30, 1823.

<sup>3</sup>Manuscript Letter, L. Chamberlain to H. Hill, August 7, 1823.

Journal of the Sandwich Islands Mission, August 30, 1823.

Missionary Letters, I, 193-93, September 1, 1823.

<sup>4</sup>Journal of the Sandwich Islands Mission, November 5, 1823.

Missionary Letters, I, 147, December 31, 1823.

Journal of the Sandwich Islands Mission, December 5, 1823.

Levi Chamberlain's Journal, III, 101, October 25, 1824.

<sup>5</sup>Mrs. E. Loomis' Diary, p. 87, December 2, 1823.

<sup>6</sup>Missionary Letters, III, 131, December 26, 1825.

<sup>7</sup>Charlotte P. Dodge, The Maile Wreath, (Honolulu, 1952), p. 30.

Manuscript Letter, L. Chamberlain to H. Hill, November 14, 1844.

HCS, Annual Report, 1907.

Manuscript Letter, E.M. Damon to B. Judd, June 12, 1952.

<sup>8</sup>HCS, Minutes of Meeting, January 23, 1908.

<sup>9</sup>HCS, Annual Report, 1908.

Prepared by:

Karmen Tiaht  
Hawaii State Archives  
August 1967

Name of Structure: Mission Printing Office  
553 South King Street  
City and County of Honolulu  
State of Hawaii

GENERAL STATEMENT

Architectural interest and merit:

The Mission Printing Office represents a purely utilitarian structure, built to house the first printing press in Hawaii.

Condition of fabric:

Although there has been some efforts in the recent past to stabilize the structure, there seems to be serious progressive deterioration of interior plaster and exterior mortar. Both are rapidly drying out to the point of pulverized powder.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EXTERIOR

This is a simple one story rectangular building measuring 29' - 10" x 18' - 8", excluding 5' - 1" porch (lanai).

Foundations:

Not accessible but presumed to be coral rock similar to the bearing walls.

Wall construction, finish, color:

Walls on the King Street (muka) and right (awa) sides consist of natural coral rock in random sizes set in heavy mortar joints which average 3" - 4" thick in the horizontal and 4" - 8" wide vertically. These mortar joints project out from the rough face of the rock. The rear (makai) and left (Waikiki) walls are finished smooth in modern white cement stucco over the coral rock.

Coursing on the front wall is more regular than on the awa wall.

Structural system, framing:

The modern roof is framed with 3" x 4" roof rafters, 3' - 0" o.c. with

3" x 3" purlins, irregularly spaced, which carry the galvanized corrugated roofing directly. Diagonal and vertical braces are 1" x 4".

Porches, stoops:

A continuous lanai (porch) extends along the King Street (mauka) side of the building, roofed by a continuation of the main roof slope, and supported on the edge by four 4" x 4" posts. Early photographs (1889) show several more posts in a different bay arrangement, and also the fact that the porch was extended to connect to the Mission Frame House on the left. These photographs also indicate a wood floor, since replaced by smooth finished concrete. There are two coral rock steps from grade in the center. On the rear (makai) side a detached shed roof covers a modern concrete walk with a coral block stoop up to finished floor level.

Chimneys:

None.

Openings - doorways and doors:

On the front (mauka) there are two doorways - one in the center and one to the right (awa). It is quite possible that this latter doorway was originally a window. A timber lintel is set in the stone work over the openings. Door trim, flat jamb and head, is set flush with the stone wall and is obviously of recent installation. There is no sill at the cement step up to floor level. Within the full width of the opening above the door there is an open wire covered ventilator 6 3/8" high. A similar doorway is in the center of the rear (makai) wall. All doors are 6-panel wood, 1 1/4" thick with horizontal rails tenoned into stiles.

Windows and shutter:

The window sash are wood double hung with iron pegs instead of sash weights to control opening. On the front there are 12/3 lights of



8" x 10" glass, and on the rear 6/6 lights with 7" x 9" glass. The exterior wood sills are let into the stonework similar to the head. The sills on the interior are concrete.

There are no shutters although the 1889 photograph shows shutters at the central doorway and also at the window to its left. There remains two bracket pintlos in the right jamb of this window.

Roof - shape, covering:

The gabled roof is presently covered with galvanized corrugated iron which appears also in a 1915 photograph. A 1906 photograph shows a shingle roof which may be wood or slate, therefore the present roofing material dates between the 1906 - 1915 period.

Cornice:

A flat 6" fascia serves as a cornice on the gabled ends.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERIOR

Floor plan:

The interior consists of two rooms, each having a cupboard built into the stone walls. The dividing partition also contains a cupboard framed together with the doorway. A recent exploratory dig near the doorway discloses a new 4" x 4 5/8" lintel over the doorway, a recent replacement. It has not been possible to determine whether this coral partition is original or a later addition.

Stairways:

None.

Flooring:

Modern smooth finished concrete.

Wall and ceiling finish:

The walls and ceilings are white plaster which is 1" thick at the exploratory holes. Plaster is finished up to the wood trim at the openings.

Doorways and doors:

The single doorway and cupboard are framed into one large opening in the room on the right (ewa). The jamb and head trim is modern. The door has been removed.

Decorative features and trim:

There are no decorative features. The exterior angle at the intersection of the plastered reveal and the wall is covered by a moulded wood trim piece.

Notable hardware:

None.

Lighting:

Modern electric.

Heating:

None.

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

Orientation and general setting:

On the south side of King Street, the Printing Office is closely set between the Mission Frame House on its left (Waikiki) and the Chamberlain House on its right (ewa).

Out buildings:

None.

Landscaping:

The three Hawaiian Mission Children Society's buildings are set back from the

street on a grass lawn, enclosed by a low coral rock wall with iron gates.

Typical plants, trees and shrubs are informally scattered on the lawn. Some of these are the Banana tree, Royal poinciana, Pili, Ti, Hibiscus and the Octopus tree. Coral stepping stones are set in the lawn.

Prepared by:

Woodrow W. Wilkins  
Supervisory Architect  
HABS Hawaii II Project

August 1967